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**PLACES OF AGRIBUSINESS: DISPLACEMENT, REPLACEMENT, AND
MISPLACEMENT IN MATO GROSSO, BRAZIL***

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ABSTRACT. This article investigates the spatial logic and different moments of place-making during the expansion of Mato Grosso's agribusiness frontier, in the southern section of the Brazilian Amazon. The analysis is informed by three conceptual concerns: the tensions between representation and experience, between humanist and class-based explanations, and between the intensity of place-making and place-framing. Empirical results from a qualitative case study (carried out between 2013--2015, when agribusiness was the undisputed locomotive of the Brazilian economy) demonstrate that socio-spatial changes in the last four decades evolved due to the complementary pressures and controversies of displacement (particularly in the 1970s--1980s) and replacement (in the 1990s--2000s), which eventually resulted in the widespread sense of misplacement due to accumulated inequalities and entrenched forms of socioeconomic exclusion. The principal conclusion found that the places dominated by agribusiness in Mato Grosso evolved around a totalizing spatial strategy that undermined alternative forms of production and livelihoods that do not fit in the export-oriented agricultural model. *Keywords:* (place-making, agricultural frontier, soybean)

<<A-HEAD>> PLACING MATO GROSSO'S AGRIBUSINESS FRONTIER

What has been the place of agribusiness in Brazilian development and how are places created in areas of fast agribusiness expansion? These questions not only animate the present analysis, but have profound implications for academic and policy debates, especially because agribusiness represents today the main economic sector of Brazil, a remarkable achievement considering that until the 1980s the country used to be a net food importer. Brazilian agribusiness means both large plantation farms and, to a lesser extent, food processing and trading companies; it is certainly not a monolithic entity, but fraught with internal tensions and multiple interests, which are nonetheless beyond the scope of the present study. The strength of Brazilian agribusiness is the combined result of technological innovation, institutional changes, and the association between public and private sectors, as residential and commercial places find themselves in the path of rapid agro-industrial development. That was particularly the case in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso, located in the southern section of the Amazon region, where vast tracts of rainforest and savannah vegetation were converted, since the 1970s, into places dominated by export-oriented farming. Mato Grosso has one of the world's fastest expanding agribusiness economies and is currently the foremost national producer of soybean, cattle, sunflower, cotton, and maize production (IMEA 2016). Agribusiness activity is concentrated in the north of the state (see Figure 1), where roads, towns, and plantation farms have irreversibly jolted the exuberant natural scenery of the upper Teles Pires river basin. The river basin is mostly occupied by first- or second-generation farmers, rural workers, and commercial partners who largely depend for their survival on the productivity of soybean and its price in globalized markets.

Figure 1 about here

The aim of this article is to investigate whether the expansion of Mato Grosso's agribusiness frontier relied on a specific spatial logic and on particular moments of place-making. It is specifically intended as contribution towards the reconciliation of contrasting interpretations of place dynamics, and towards the connection between place and other geographical categories, such as landscape, spatial frontiers, and agricultural development. The emphasis on place is justified here because of the richness of meanings the term conveys, including material and symbolic processes of lived, and constantly recreated, geographies. As it is well known, the notion of place commonly refers to a particular site or region, with identity of social groups and with the interdependencies with other locations and related scales of social life (Cloeke and others 2005). Nonetheless, together with anthropologists, planners and other scholars (see McDonald 2014; Kotzebue 2016; Lems 2016), geographers have tried to reinterpret the concept and merge personal and representative dimensions with collective and socioeconomic properties of places. Geographers have explored places in relation to the accessibility of certain zones, gender and racial framing, property relations, community sustainability, resistance of spatial change and place-claiming movements, among other related themes (e.g. Curtis 2000; Gornostaeva 2009; Marsden 2013; Taylor 2012). According to John Agnew, the different meanings of place can be summarised under the expressions "place as location" (a point on the Earth's surface), "sense of place" (subjective feelings) and "place as locale" (a setting for actions and interactions) (1987). Therefore, by focusing principally on places, the current study will be able to challenge the apparent homogenisation of space imposed by the aggressive advance of the agribusiness-based economy and reveal a range of socio-spatial contradictions normally ignored because of the alleged lack of socioeconomic alternatives.

The analysis gives special emphasis on how the production of new places in the Teles Pires river basin combined elements of an ultramodern economic boom with precapitalist

practices left over from the early conquest of the territory. To validate the imposition of the “modernist” agricultural economy, the official discourse employed in the middle of the last century emphasised that this was “no man’s land,” available for anyone willing to occupy and produce. There was a systematic and well-crafted promise of rationality, progress, and welfare underpinning public policies and government actions (Ioris 2014). However, the founding elements of a supposedly “new” reality was actually loaded with violence and wrongdoings, as if the Brazilian past, marked by genocide and illegality, “suddenly explod[ed] in the face of all” (Martins 2012, 52). Those were all integral components of a remarkable spatial experience articulated around a very specific sense of place in the area, which can be already perceived in the following interview extract:

“When we arrived here, there was no production, because there was no market, only for timber. In practice, we really bought a forest and the land was a sort of bonus, had no [market] value... And we started to work, worked hard, cut and burn the forest; it was incredible, all those monkeys screaming, and the amount of smoke... but in time Sinop became what it is today, a place of progress, with a vibrant economy and people who work hard.” [Interview with one of pioneers, who in 1978 arrived in the region, age sixty-seven, Sinop, June 2015]

It is also important to observe that, despite some research carried out in recent years, the literature on Mato Grosso’s socio-spatiality has been mainly restricted to landscape ecology and biophysical processes. The exception was social science research on sustainability, urbanization, and agrarian reform, among other place-related themes---see Wittman 2005; Arnould de Sartre and others 2012; Thypin-Bermeo and Godfrey 2012---but less has been published about the translation of development goals into the production and the trajectory of places. Whereas the juncture between globalized forces and localized spatial outcomes has been acknowledged by social scientists, we often come across only narrow,

fragmented assessments of the multilayered and complex intersections between agri-food systems and place-based interactions.

In order to cope with the intricate ontological questions related to place we can rely on the geographical sensibilities of the Mato Grosso--born poet Manoel de Barros (1916--2014), considered one of the greatest names of contemporary Brazilian literature. Not only are his aesthetics passionately ecological---in terms of attention to natural features that deserve contemplation and retain exquisite beauty---but the poet dreamed of a new condition for Mato Grosso and its people, dreams that call for a humanist transformation of places. Manoel grew up in a time when distances seemed immense and time moved very slowly. In his words, mentioned in a documentary, his family lived “in a place where there was nothing (...) and we had to invent” the world; “invention was required to enlarge the world” and “disturb” the existing, normal meaning of things (Cezar 2010). Manoel’s main proposition was that Mato Grosso had yet to be “invented” in order to remove its embarrassing anachronisms and decipher unarticulated truths. The poet realised, since his childhood in the 1920s, that the immensity of Mato Grosso was incomplete and, consequently, his world had still to be created---that is, the intense and sophisticated exchanges between nature and the small number of inhabitants needed to be complemented with broader social intercourses and connections with wider Brazilian and international society. A new reality needed to be invented, one necessary to unlock the deep structures of the existing, intensely localized, world.

As a result, Manoel’s work is extremely valuable for the purposes of the present investigation because of his ecological ethics and place-based poetics. Such a heterodox approach follows the suggestion of Shelagh Squire that the interface between geography and literature can uncover multifaceted spatial meanings, particularly through the appreciation of the “texts of place” rendered by the writer (1996). Informed by Manoel’s dream of a

different, more extensive, but also more inclusive geography, the next pages will deal with the dialectics between displacement-replacement, the pervasiveness of misplacement, and place-based prospects for the future. Before that, it is necessary to clarify our conceptual framework and consider three interpretative concerns that need clarification and will enlighten the analysis of place-based changes.

<<A-HEAD>> THREE MAIN INTERPRETATIVE ENTANGLEMENTS

There are at least three main interpretative entanglements that require specific attention ahead of our empirical analysis of place dynamics in the north of Mato Grosso. First, we need to acknowledge that, similar to other key geographical concepts, the meaning of place is fraught with ambiguity and openness, which cannot be entirely or definitely removed. In addition, the analytical relevance of place can only be properly appreciated in relation to other connected terms, such as scale, time, and, particularly, landscape. Both place and landscape are socio-spatial constructs with no fixed boundaries and, to some extent, the two terms have similar connotations. Nonetheless, while place tends to be more often associated with the existential and particular, landscapes are normally related to the appearance of an area---its image and representation---or as a “way of seeing” the sociopolitical processes that shape the landscape (Cosgrove 1998). “Landscape is a representation of place, and as such, it is the re-presentation of a relatedness to place, a re-presentation of a mode of ‘emplacement’” (Malpas 2011, 7). Landscapes normally encapsulate places, at the same time that places disclose more visibly the politics of landscape features.

Taking an anthropological perspective, Júlia Carolino demonstrates the role of landscape perception, and its materiality, in the lived process of place-making (although she downplays slightly the materiality of places in favour of the supposed embodiment provided by landscapes) (2010). Likewise, Tim Ingold argues---against spatial segmentations and human-society dichotomies---“the landscape is the world as it is known to those who dwell

therein, who inhabit its places and journal along the paths connecting them” (2000, 193). Ingold emphasizes that the form of landscape appears detached from the immediate engagement of the agents, at the same time that makes more tangible the preconstituted social and political entities. Consequently, place-making can be seen as the endowment of locations with meaning through lived experiences, the circulation of narratives and spatialized interactions at different, interconnected scales (from local to national and global), whereas landscape processes are primarily focused on the interrelation between spatial features that are perceived according to the position of the observer and have a stronger representational character. The continuities between place and landscape are helpful here, because places in Mato Grosso are locations of intense meaning and interaction, at the same time that the evolution of places result in the highly emblematic and widely mentioned landscapes of agribusiness.

Second, there is still significant disagreement about the content and the ramifications of place dynamics. It is well known that the importance of place for critical human geography was greatly reinforced in the 1970s by the work of humanist scholars, who investigated the specific features of individual and group life. Humanist geographers insisted that places are not determined in advance, but are simultaneously performed, sensed, and represented. Yi-Fu Tuan underscored the importance of understanding people’s behaviour, conditions, ideas, and feelings in relation to the intricacies of place-making (1976). Such agent-based and phenomenological interpretations were directly concerned with questions about consciousness, experience, and intentionality. Important is the “sense of place,” as the affective ties between individuals, groups, and where they live (Johnston 1986). However, a few years later, in the 1980s, scholars associated with Marxist geography challenged the excessive focus on the local and the subjective by humanist colleagues. According to this group of authors, humanists tended romanticize people’s attachment to places and

underestimated issues such as inequality and political disputes. Places assume specific attributes under the capitalist mode of production, as capital is able to move quickly and cheaply from place to place, depending “upon the creation of fixed, secure and largely immobile social and physical infrastructures” (Harvey 2001, 332). Therefore, place and space were considered inescapably conquered by capitalism and the two must be treated dialectically within an internally related framework that melts together specificities and generalities (Merrifield 1993).

Other authors have since then tried to reconcile these two theorizations of place, namely, the more individualistic, agency-centered and the class-based, structure-informed approaches. The synthetic argument is that both agency and structure are mutually constitutive and determine each other at different scales and places. The observer and what is observed are not detached, as suggested by some humanist approaches, but places are designated spaces infused with meanings and resulting from social practices and historicized work. While there is a global and globalized sense of places, the “global is in the local in the very process of the formation of the local” (Massey 1994, 120). Consequently, grand narratives about place, and any other spatial formation, exert a highly negative influence, because they obscure the importance of gender, race, caste, and age differences and, as a result, lower the possibility for genuine political change (Massey 1993). The complexity and variegatedness of places definitely require conceptions of abstract power complemented by the politics of everyday life, which should account for interpersonal relations, networks of subjectivity, and socioeconomic systems. Erik Swyngedouw adds that the politicization of place, as much as the dynamics of social change and the possibilities of political emancipation, are important elements of critical scholarship and have a role in the production of a truly humanising geography (1999). Doreen Massey further argues that geographers need to advocate a “progressive sense of place” to people, that is, geographers have the moral

obligation to show people that place-based actions and understandings make no sense without acknowledging all those things impinging on place from outside (1993). This present study is certainly a concrete attempt to work within such “progressive” approach to place and place-based interactions at the frontier of agribusiness expansion.

The third interpretative entanglement is linked to the previous two points, but specifically related to the intensity of place change over time. In a situation of dramatic reconfiguration of the spatial order, as in the case of the advance of the agricultural frontier in Mato Grosso, the continuous phenomenon of place-making assumes a more intricate and, crucially, a more clear political character. These are periods when multiple spatial connections and ramifications across scales have to be rapidly negotiated---and are normally resisted all the way---which results in configurations of place that are both highly transitory and more subject to sociopolitical disputes. The intensity of such place transformations corresponds to an extraordinary mechanism of spatial change, which can be described as place-framing and during which political disputes become even more visible and play a more forceful role in socio-spatial dynamics. It is worth remembering that Erving Goffman (1974), quoted in Martin (2004), defines “framing” as how individuals organise experiences or make sense of localized events. However, for the purpose of our analysis, place-framing refers to a concentrated, transient process of spatial transformation when the socioeconomic and biophysical features of the existing places are checked and swiftly modified. Latent or silent disagreements that were present during the longer process of place-making can likewise erupt and escalate during the more contested and unstable period of place-framing. The moments of place-framing are therefore critical, decisive phases when the fundamental pillars of the new spatial order are disputed by different groups and sectors, who try to influence the direction of place change according to their interests and the wider balance of power.

These three main interpretative connections only briefly discussed here---the tensions between representation and experience, between humanist and class-based explanations, and between the intensity of place-making and place-framing---will directly inform our analysis and help us to understand the spatial evolution of the agricultural frontier in Mato Grosso from the heuristic and highly illuminating perspective of place. We can easily accept that the proposed research had ambitious analytical goals and could have ramified into specific, separate assessments of each of those three tensions. Nonetheless, the aim was to articulate a single conceptual framework able to capture place-making as a multidimensional phenomenon---including lived experiences and symbolic representations---that both includes and excludes social groups according to economic, political, racial, and cultural differences and that has a historical evolution that is nonlinear, but oscillates between moments of more intense and more discrete transformation.

Before moving into the production (“invention”) of places at the agricultural frontier of Mato Grosso, a few words on methods are necessary. The present discussion is based on longitudinal fieldwork in the Teles Pires (involving three main fieldtrips) between 2013 and 2015, which included the analysis of policy documents, twenty-eight semistructured interviews (to allow a comprehensive overview of the different sectors and until the responses started to repeat, indicating a level of “saturation”), informal discussions and walks in the fields with farmers, attendance of public meetings, and the analysis of secondary data. Interviews with farmers in the Teles Pires area followed interviews with policymakers, NGO activists, private companies, research centers (such as Embrapa), and political leaders in the state capital, Cuiabá. With the help of local academics at the universities UFMT and UNEMAT (both in the Cuiabá and Sinop units), interviewees and informants were identified, initial contacts were set up, and the research then followed a snowball approach. The particular focus of the interviews was the evolution of the agriculture frontier and the

formation of new places, considering material, cultural, economic, evocative, and political aspects of the process. Almost all the respondents were originally outsiders who migrated to Mato Grosso in search of economic opportunities and a better livelihood. With the mapping of sectors and organizations, their discourse and stated aims, it was possible to compare intra- and intergroup differences and the range of alliances or socio-spatial disputes. Semistructured interviews were complemented with analysis of documents, statistics, websites, leaflets, public presentations, and newspaper articles found in university libraries and in the archives of public agencies and private entities.

The strategy of inquiry consisted of an ‘embedded case study’ (Yin 2009), which started by considering subunits of localized social action; these were then scaled up to identify common patterns in larger geographical spheres. The emphasis of the research was the meso-scale (the Teles Pires River Basin, also known today as the north of Mato Grosso “soybean region”; see Figure 2) with insights into the microscale of place (towns, farms, and neighbourhoods). The study focused on the most emblematic municipalities in the region--- Sorriso, Sinop, and Lucas do Rio Verde---that were established along the BR-163 motorway, with a length of 1,777 km, inaugurated in 1976 to connect Cuiabá with the city of Santarém in the neighbouring state of Pará (Figure 3). The intention was not to undertake a comprehensive analysis of place in the studied municipalities, but to use the information and impressions accumulated during the research to make inferences about the meso-scale of place change. The research was particularly attentive to the intensification of agribusiness operations, in the form of large-scale crop production and with the influence of transnational corporations selling farming inputs and purchasing production. There is strong evidence of what Michael Woods describes as the remaking of rural places by the “differentiated geography of rural globalisation”---that is, the production of a globalized countryside that is only partially or problematically integrated into wider processes of homogenisation and

hybridisation (2007). Inspired by Manoel's ontological proposition about the world to be invented, we will now examine the troubling trajectory of places in the Teles Pires river basin.

Figures 2 and 3 about here

<<A-HEAD>> PLACE-FRAMING THROUGH THE TWIN PRESSURES OF DISPLACEMENT AND REPLACEMENT

During most colonial and postcolonial Brazilian history, the north of Mato Grosso was considered a universe apart, mostly occupied by “intractable” Indian tribes and with little connection with the rest of the country (Buarque de Holanda 1994). That began to change in the 1930s with systematic plans of economic and regional integration launched by the national government (Ioris 2012). The decisive phase of spatial transformation came with the strong resolve of the military presidents---between 1964 and 1985---to force agriculture development upon the remote corners of the center-west and the Amazon regions. (The north of Mato Grosso is exactly at the intersection between these two macroregions.) National and international companies were attracted to the regions through various forms of fiscal incentives and subsidies for timber and cattle production. At the same time, impoverished small farmers migrated from other Brazilian states in search of a piece of land in public and, mostly, private colonization projects (Jepson 2006). Social mobility was notoriously restricted in the Brazilian countryside (Costa Pinto 1965), but the new agricultural frontier raised the promise of social betterment and the possibility to own a larger rural property. Most new farmers came from the southern states and the majority acquired a piece of land of between 10 and 300 hectares (Santos 2011). In that process, numerous new urban and rural

places were produced due to the operation of private and public colonization companies and the mobilisation of social groups from different parts of the country.

The state of Mato Grosso, in particular, was the “paradise of private colonization” projects (Oliveira 1989, 106), which were established together with a smaller number of public colonization schemes, because of the great availability of land and the increased accessibility facilitated by heavy investments in public infrastructure. One of the most emblematic experiences was the formation of the municipality of Sinop---now the main urban settlement in the Teles Pires (130,000 inhabitants, estimated for 2015 by IBGE)---after the acquisition by a company of the same name [*Colonizadora Sinop*] of a property with 645,000 hectares, known as Gleba Celeste. The urban area of Sinop started in 1972 and the streets were named, ironically, after species of local trees, just as deforestation rapidly advanced. The founder of Sinop, Ênio Pipino, famously declared that Gleba Celeste “was a green world, sleeping, in the loneliness of the Amazon” (in Souza 2006, 144), and also that he was “planting civilisations” and creating a liveable Amazon by opening roads and clearing forests and jungles (Pipino 1982). Colonization projects like Sinop were aggressively advertised to prospective farmers as an opportunity to restart their lives anew, in a clear mechanism of “place myth” that was necessary to overcome the negative stereotypes of the new frontier and the widespread images of isolation and hazard (Brannstrom and Neuman 2009, 125).

The new places that started in the 1970s dramatically reshaped the original landscapes with savannah and forest. More important for the purpose of our discussion, it serves to demonstrate the difference between place---as the spatial result of particular experiences that are lived and performed, but also fraught with power disputes---and landscape: as the way of seeing and the general appearance of an area. Place change was directly affected by the official policymaking centered on the rapid and simultaneous transformation of urban and rural areas, particularly in private colonization schemes, according to the imperative of

national security and regional development (as defined by the ruling military dictatorship). Figure 4 illustrates the campaign to attract farmers to Mato Grosso and makes evident the legitimacy claims raised by the colonization company, in this case with the inclusion of the image of the then president General Geisel. Likewise, the figure includes the emotive expression, “This land is your land. Cultivate it” [*Este chão é seu. Cultive-o*’], which reveals the coordinated attempt to foster a new sense of place, justified by the opportunity of a better future, together with class-based policies trying to contain agrarian problems through internal migration, instead of promoting the expected agrarian reform in the south of the country).

Figure 4 about here

Examples like Sinop suggest that the first period of place transformation in the Teles Pires, manifested as an intense moment of place-framing, was fundamentally characterized by the displacement of the existing socio-ecological features through an intense politics of arrivals and, soon after, unintended departures (see below). New places at the frontier of agricultural expansion were essentially the result of the removal of the original vegetation, the influx of thousands of migrants, and the promotion of a gradually more intense production. It was a large-scale process of “development induced displacement” (Wittman 2005, 96) in which the transition to a new socio-spatial order was not automatic, but happened through the violent dislodgment of those already living in the area and an increasing commodification of nature and its conversion into natural “resources” (for example: land, water, timber, and bushmeat). Displacement was not a purely social process, but it involved both the transference of land to the hands of the new farmers who came from other Brazilian regions---at the expense of the livelihood of squatters and indigenous groups--and the conversion of savannah and forest into pastures and cropland.

The wider agenda of regional development obviously intersected with the aspirations and experiences of families and groups involved in, and affected by, the production of new places. That observation is related to the aforesaid second interpretative entanglement, in the sense that both the structure and the agency behind place change are mutually constitutive and determine each other. Moreover, despite the rapid expansion of the new agricultural frontier, many newcomers struggled to maintain their activity, especially because of the failure to receive the promised support from the government and the lack of market or transportation for their production. Soon after the first phase in the 1970s and early 1980s (characterized by the pressures of displacement), several political and economic constraints limited the ability of the federal administration to keep the doors of the agriculture frontier wide open; in particular, the burden of public debt and high inflation in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was a turbulent period of reorganization when not only the small farmers faced difficulties in maintaining their activities in areas of the agriculture frontier; many large property owners and rural companies [called *companhias* or *empresas agropecuárias*] failed to cope with the costs of transportation, distant markets, low productivity, and, especially, dwindling subsidies and incentives. Most ruined entrepreneurs had to leave for other parts of the Amazon and beyond (Souza 2013), or returned to their places of origin in southern Brazilian states. Since 1980 migration out of Mato Grosso intensified and the rate even doubled in the 1990s compared to the 1970s (Cunha 2006).

This was particularly evident in the municipality of Lucas do Rio Verde, which initially attracted 203 families of small farmers from the state of Rio Grande do Sul (Oliveira 2005); after a difficult beginning, just a minority of the original pioneers remained in Lucas do Rio Verde---less than 10 percent---while most lost their properties due to the operational adversities, unfulfilled promises, and accumulated debts (Oliveira 1989; Santos 1993). This experience vividly suggests that the process of displacement could not happen in isolation

and, even as the existing features were being displaced, another key trend---replacement---was unfolding. Many of the families drawn to the agribusiness frontier were actually becoming redundant and had to swiftly adapt to a reality fraught with unexpected difficulties. It became increasingly clear that land in the new places was no longer available to all newcomers. Less productive workers and decapitalized farmers were largely replaced by a small number of skilled machine operators (trained to cope with the rapid automatization and informatization of farming procedures) and by a small number of increasingly wealthy landowners in possession of vast rural properties (Mattei 1998). The formation of such large farms, called *latifundios*, was a novelty in the region, where the majority of agriculture activities had been historically concentrated in small, subsistence farmsteads.

In this way, the same frontier that attracted migrants, as a seductive mirage and promise of a better life to most, began to replace the majority of those initially involved. Those original farmers who found themselves in a cycle of debt had essentially three options: find employment in the increasingly large agribusiness farms, try to receive a small plot in agrarian reform projects, or transfer their activity to a small farmstead near to the towns. The impact of replacement pressures can be appreciated in the following interview extract:

“I came to Mato Grosso twenty-nine years ago, lost my initial property because of the banks [impossibility to pay back the loans]... and I am now trying to preserve my small piece of land, only 1.5 hectares large, in Sinop. I sell my milk directly to my clientele; I refuse to give it to the industry because they pay almost nothing. I try to survive, but so much is still lacking. When I go to the hospital, I am really humiliated... Soybean is not helping us at all and the future is not looking any better...” [small-scale farmer, age fifty-two, Sinop, July 2015]

Replacement, as the second period of place-framing, was not only restricted to the concentration of landed property and the conversion of the weaker farmers into farm laborers. It involved other profound changes in economic and technological trends, including the

substitution of the various crops unsuccessfully tried in the 1970s (such as coffee, cassava, guaraná, pepper, and rice) with the overpowering presence, higher profitability, and symbolic importance of soybean (predicated on the use of intense agronomic techniques, expensive machinery, and profound financialization of production). Because of the intense interplay between displacement and replacement---under the powerful influence of agribusiness development policies---most of the Teles Pires region become a gigantic “soyscape” formed by contiguous large-scale farms primarily dedicated to the cultivation of soybean (in succession or rotation with a few other crops). Figures 2 and 5, respectively, provide an overview of the region and a place-based impression of the soyscape.

Figure 5 about here

Agriculture production in Brazil was increasingly influenced by events taking place outside the sector, including trade liberalisation, deregulation, credit reforms, and removal of price support policies (Helfand and Rezende 2004). After a moment of great turbulence in the early 1990s, there was a revitalization of place-framing at the agricultural frontier, helped by currency devaluation in 1999; booming commodity prices in the 2000s; foreign investments in productive, and speculative, ventures; and growing demands for soybeans from Asia, especially from China. Farmers in Mato Grosso also became better organized and created, in 1993, a highly effective technological institute, the MT Foundation, responsible for the development of more productive and disease resistant crop varieties. The work of the MT Foundation complemented other technologies traditionally developed by public universities and, especially, Embrapa---the public agriculture research corporation. As a result, both the established transnational (Monsanto, ADM, Bunge, Cargill, Dreyfus) and the new, rapidly growing Brazilian transnational corporations (Amaggi, BR Foods, JBS, Marfrig) played a decisive role in terms of business activities and influence behind policymaking. Several

large-scale national companies were sold to transnational corporations due to various difficulties associated with market deregulation policies introduced in the 1990s (Wilkinson 2009), at the same time that a handful of Brazilian corporations benefited directly from generous loans and surreptitious support offered by the federal development bank BNDES during the populist Lula-Dilma administrations between 2003 and 2016 (Dieguez 2015).

However, there are other political and symbolic repercussions resulting from the twin process of displacement and replacement in the Teles Pires. The soybean-based economy was, and continues to be, constantly portrayed by sector representatives as a fine expression of technological efficiency and administrative know-how, which is used as undisputed evidence that rational, high-tech rural development works (as analyzed by Chase 2003 in the nearby State of Goiás and by Brannstrom and Brandão 2012 in the north-eastern state of Bahia). The sector representatives claim that technified agribusiness replaced a tradition of chaos, incompetence, and turbulence typically associated with previous rounds of economic development in the Amazon with a new socio-spatial reality based on rationalism, knowledge, and competence (Ioris 2016). The argument demonstrates what can be described as the “narcissism” of the agricultural frontier, in which self-constructed declarations of heroism and of unquestionable achievements---mainly by large-scale farmers---serve to fulfil a prophecy of success and the triumph of the new configuration of places brought to the region. The symbolism and rhetoric of the successful frontier plays an important role in the definition of the new agriculture places against other possibilities that are outside (what Massey considers the production of selective inclusion and boundaries of exclusion [1994]). Furthermore, although “a great part of the land title in the Brazilian Amazon doesn’t pass a serious judicial examination” (Oliveira 2005, 91), the high productivity of soybean and the impressive expansion of areas under cultivation are used to vindicate the violence, the mistakes, and the illegality employed for the creation of the frontier. The agricultural frontier

was established to serve, and continues to attend, primarily, the political-economic agendas of the self-proclaimed victorious agribusiness players, at the expense of the demands of the majority of the regional population, what results in the widespread sense of misplacement, considered next.

<<A-HEAD>> THE RESULTING SENSE OF DISPLACEMENT

The agribusiness sector in the Teles Pires produced urban and rural places of intense economic activity, but also fraught with differences, tensions, and unevenness. It was, and remains, a highly contested and disputed socio-spatial process in which the configuration of economy and society are still being shaped and are repeatedly affected by the instabilities of agricultural markets and public policies. Instead of simply place-making, what prevailed in the Teles Pires was the more politicized process of place-framing, which is demonstrated by the rapid rhythm of changes related to displacement and replacement pressures. The experience of place-framing was also associated with systematic efforts of legitimization and silent, but important, contestation. On the one hand, the high-tech agriculture practiced in the Teles Pires secured national and international prestige among agribusiness players and has been widely praised for its productivity, rationality, and entrepreneurialism. On the other, there are striking contrasts, for example, between wealthy urban areas and agribusiness farms on the one hand, and the poverty of urban peripheries and small family farms on the other. Poverty is definitely not an easy concept, but the available statistics indicate that around one-third of the population in the cities of the agribusiness frontier suffer from the lack of adequate housing and basic public services (Frederico 2011). Differences like that are typical of nouveau riche regions, particularly in Latin America, where the accelerated expansion of a lucrative economic sector benefits primarily those with monopoly power over land, resources, and markets. However, because of the distinctive origins and the turbulent advance

of the agriculture frontier, it seems that there is more than just ostentation and socio-spatial inequality in the Teles Pires. The empirical evidence, primarily from documents, meetings, and interviews, suggests that despite signs of progress and opulence life in the Teles Pires remains in a state of great uncertainty and stiff constraints, particularly to small farmers living in-between large estates:

“When rains we can see the ‘*veneno*’ [literally, ‘poison’, but actually meaning agrochemicals] coming down the river, destroying our waterbodies, and with the hydropower dams now it is only getting worse. It started with cattle, the cutting of trees, now soybean... These farmers don’t care that we are seeing, that it is affecting our life... We could do more, but we need more things, more help [from the government].” [Sinop, small farmer, 29 March 2014]

This interview extract exposes a situation in which many social groups are always “out of place” due to policies and measures that consolidate the agricultural frontier as narrow places of settlement and production (see Prout and Howitt 2009). One main source of such socio-spatial volatility is the fact that, because of the political-economic crisis of agribusiness the early 1990s, the region was hastily and firmly inserted into the circuits of global agri-food markets and neoliberal economic reforms, including the privatization of roads and the growing funding of production by transnational corporations, instead of the traditional loans from public banks (Ioris 2015). The regional economy is now largely embedded in transspatial flows and international networks through which power is exercised extraterritorially (see Amin 2004). Public and private life has been affected by those adjustments that, despite renovating the regional economy, reinforced the pattern of socio-ecological exploitation, vulnerability, and political subordination.

The intense periods of place-framing in the Teles Pires---in the 1970s--1980s, and then 1990s--2000s---were both based on a fundamental paradox between the presumption of progress and collective achievement, and the concealment of the fact that most social and

economic opportunities are increasingly restricted to a small number of residents. While agribusiness is ubiquitous, not as merely an economic activity, but as the holy grail of modernization and is formally available to all; in reality it is touched by a tiny minority of the population (large landowners and agro-industrial enterprises). It means that the alleged success of the places framed at the agricultural frontier is insufficient to conceal the mounting contradictions and tensions of what Beatriz Heredia and colleagues describe as the society of agribusiness (2010). As observed by an advisor of the agriculture federation FAMATO (which mainly represents the interests of large-scale farmers), “there is a lot of technology available today, but it is in the hands of only a few, the big [farmers]” (interview in December 2014). It also confirms the core notion, expressed in the first interpretative entanglement, that place is fraught with ambiguity, but it is at the same time the manifestation of historical and geographical particularisms. There are serious concerns in the Teles Pires with, among other issues, the long-term viability of soybean production, the risks of a very narrow economic base, the isolation of the region in relation to input suppliers and soybean buyers, and the hidden agenda of politicians and agribusiness leaders that seem to exclude the many people:

“We live because we are obstinate, because we occupy our space, but I am really concerned about the continuous difficulties. What kind of development is this that leaves us with only a tiny bit of space?” [peasant in an agrarian reform project, age forty-four, Sinop, December 2014]

Comments like this suggest that several decades of the spatial dialectics of displacement and replacement actually resulted in a pervasive sentiment of misplacement. Despite all the positive images transmitted daily in the local and national media, the economic success of the region seems misplaced, its future is ambiguous, and most of the population still struggle to reconcile being and belonging. The fact that misplacement is the

dialectical synthesis of the interplay between displacement and replacement taking place in the Teles Pires, further reveals the full extent of the colonization of space by capital. A clear indication of that is that present-day agriculture in the Teles Pires is now decisively associated with the activity of transnational corporations---controlled either by national or international capital, as mentioned above---in charge of selling farm inputs, and controlling credit and foreign trade. More importantly, new places have been framed because of the alleged advantages of the agriculture frontier, whereas these are, in effect, signs of great weaknesses of its narrow production base.

Something that is particularly relevant in the Teles Pires is that the unsettling sense of misplacement continues to define place-based interactions in the region long after the initial opening of the agricultural frontier. Present-day circumstances, marked by the hegemony of agribusiness at the expense of any other socioeconomic alternative, remain directly based on the original mechanisms of territorial conquest and political control put in practice since the middle of the last century. The violent displacement of the earlier socio-ecological reality was not followed by a condition of spatial stability, but was instead complemented, and magnified, by a never-ending replacement of people, knowledge, and social practices.

As in most of the southern and eastern sections of the Amazon region, agribusiness development imposed an urban logic and globalized life styles. Less than 30 percent of the population now reside in the countryside and landowners typically live in the cities and commute every day, only spending greater time in the rural property during seeding and harvesting periods (Rempel 2014). Denise Elias defines those towns as agribusiness municipalities with high levels of urbanisation and a range of specialised services to attend to the demands of modern agriculture (including logistics and financial services), but also with marked contrasts between the wealthy center and a growing urban periphery consisting of low-paid workers and the unemployed (2007). There are sustained and disturbing cases of

racial and socioeconomic discrimination against the urban poor, who typically migrated from the Northeast or other parts of the Amazon and who are normally nonwhite migrants (such as the majority of the residents interviewed in the periphery of Sinop and Sorriso, the two main cities in the Teles Pires, respectively in the deprived neighborhoods of São Domingos and Boa Esperança; Figures 6 and 7).

Figures 6 and 7 about here

These images greatly help to understand the socio-spatial contradictions of the lived places in the Teles Pires region and the growing gap between globalized affluence and localized, vividly experienced, poverty and deprivation. Such patterns of inequality and discrimination are certainly not new in the history of Brazil, but were nonetheless brought back and recreated according to the priorities of agribusiness-based regional development. The new places in the Teles Pires are the idiosyncratic result of this balance between innovation and perpetuation achieved through the interplay between displacement and replacement and manifested in the widespread sense of misplacement.

<<A-HEAD>> CONCLUSIONS: FRAMING PLACES, EMPLACING CONTROVERSY

Due to the convergence of developmentalist policies and the attraction of large contingents of migrants, the northern section of Mato Grosso has become one of the important frontiers of agricultural expansion in recent decades. Instead of a gradual advance of private property and market transactions as in other areas of agricultural frontier, the national government planned and imposed the new places in the Teles Pires upon vast areas and easily mechanizable tablelands since the 1970s. The main conclusion that can be drawn from the specific historico-geographical experience is that it followed a very different trajectory to the humanistic and deeply ecological proposition put forward by Manoel de Barros for his

motherland. The poet wished for an “invention” of Mato Grosso, because it was a world apart, fraught with anachronisms and subject to spatial forces that isolated people into remote communities. Manoel’s main intention was to reconfigure those places and realise human potentialities at the same time (“Good is to fit in the landscapes as a river, a stone’ [*Bom é constar das paisagens como um rio, uma pedra*], compare Barros 2013, 390). But Manoel also warned about a rival pathway, which was qualitatively inferior and would produce a misleading reality based on lies and wrongdoing. From the empirical evidence available, there is plenty of material to infer that Manoel’s stipulation was not observed. On the contrary, the geographical typology provided by Manoel---that is, the difference between invention (as something genuine and positive) and falsehood (as inauthentic and dubious)---helps us to realise that the new places in the Teles Pires have been framed through an accumulation of promises and frustrations, instead of the proper invention of the world. That happened through another crucial paradox, in a long sequence of perverse controversies: what was considered too simple a space was displaced and replaced with an even simpler space, which is only deceptively more sophisticated or more advanced.

Instead of a humanist, progressive invention of places---advocated by Manoel in order to overcome falsehood---place dynamics in the Teles Pires obeyed a distinctive spatial trajectory marked by displacement, replacement, and, in the end, misplacement of economy and society. Table 1 contains a synthesis of each phase of place-making (manifested in the Teles Pires primarily as periods of the intense phenomenon of place-framing), its main impacts and consequences. What existed before had to be violently displaced through the firm hand of the state and the involvement of a large number of impoverished farmers from the south of Brazil (and also some business enterprises in search of the easy, subsidised government incentives). The region was opened up to public and private colonization schemes and rent-seeking companies in an intense socio-spatial process boosted by the state

through the construction of roads, airfields, storage facilities, and the growing expansion of urban settlements. Soon after the agricultural frontier was considered irreversible, there was an opportunity to accommodate the needs and aspirations of all those initially involved, which clearly reveals the entanglement between structure and agency shaping new places. Although at first the aim was to occupy areas considered (or made) empty and cope with major structural deficiencies in the best way possible, since the 1980s the main driving-force has been to replace the promise of land for all and emphasise high-tech, efficient agribusiness production as the only way forward. Instead of making the world bigger, as Manoel wanted, place-framing in the region has been characterized by spatial compression through the accumulation of land and accelerated financialization of production, particularly under the sphere of influence of multinational corporations and private banks. Another factor is the growing hegemony of globalized agri-food systems, which has further reduced the socioeconomy, agri-food production, and interpersonal interactions to the narrow practices and distorted semiotics of agribusiness.

Table 1 about here

The Teles Pires river basin now is not only a chain of numerous places that are profoundly interconnected, but the new places also reveal a great deal about tensions related to spatial change and are themselves geographical frontiers between the new spatiality of agribusiness and old, exclusionary practices. Beyond the apparent uniformity of crop fields and the homogeneity of plantation farms there are major social inequalities, the almost forgotten genocide suffered by indigenous groups and the risks of a socioeconomy reliant on almost a single activity: soybean production and export. Although the advocates of agribusiness make optimistic claims about the “brave new places”---as in the case of the pervasive expression used by agribusiness leaders that “this is the Brazil that is doing well”

[*este é o Brasil que dá certo*]---they systematically pursue strategies that are inherently partial and leave most of the population and socio-nature behind. The places dominated by agribusiness in the area are undeniably based on a totalizing spatial plan, systematically defended and reinforced by senior public authorities and sector representatives, which has unfortunately excluded many social groups and undermined alternative forms of production and livelihoods.

That leads us to a final observation, which has worldwide repercussions: there was nothing inevitable in the process of rural and regional development promoted in the Teles Pires, but at the same time, and considering the long tradition of violent territorial conquest and place-making in Brazil, the problems, conflicts, and injustices that characterized its turbulent geographical trajectory were all, more or less, visible from the outset. In other words, very little could have gone differently in the Teles Pires, considering the bitter lessons from the Brazilian past and the brutal mechanisms of socio-spatial change, chiefly in the form of place-framing. At least this focus on place-based disputes and controversies helps us to make sense of Mato Grosso's discriminatory and intolerant geography in the making.

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Captions:

Figure 1 – Location of the Teles Pires region in Mato Grosso and in South America.

Figure 2 – Aerial image of the landscape in the Teles Pires (Dec. 2014); all pictures by the author, unless otherwise stated.

Figure 3 – BR-163 motorway in the 1970s (*source* Souza, 2006).

Figure 4 – Advertisement of SINOP's inauguration in 1974, with the image of the dictator General Ernesto Geisel (*source* Colonizadora Sinop).

Figure 5 – Soyscape at the farm level in Sorriso (Dec. 2014).

Figure 6 – Periphery of Sinop (São Domingos) in Dec. 2014.

Figure 7 – Periphery of Sorriso (Boa Esperança) in Jun. 2015.

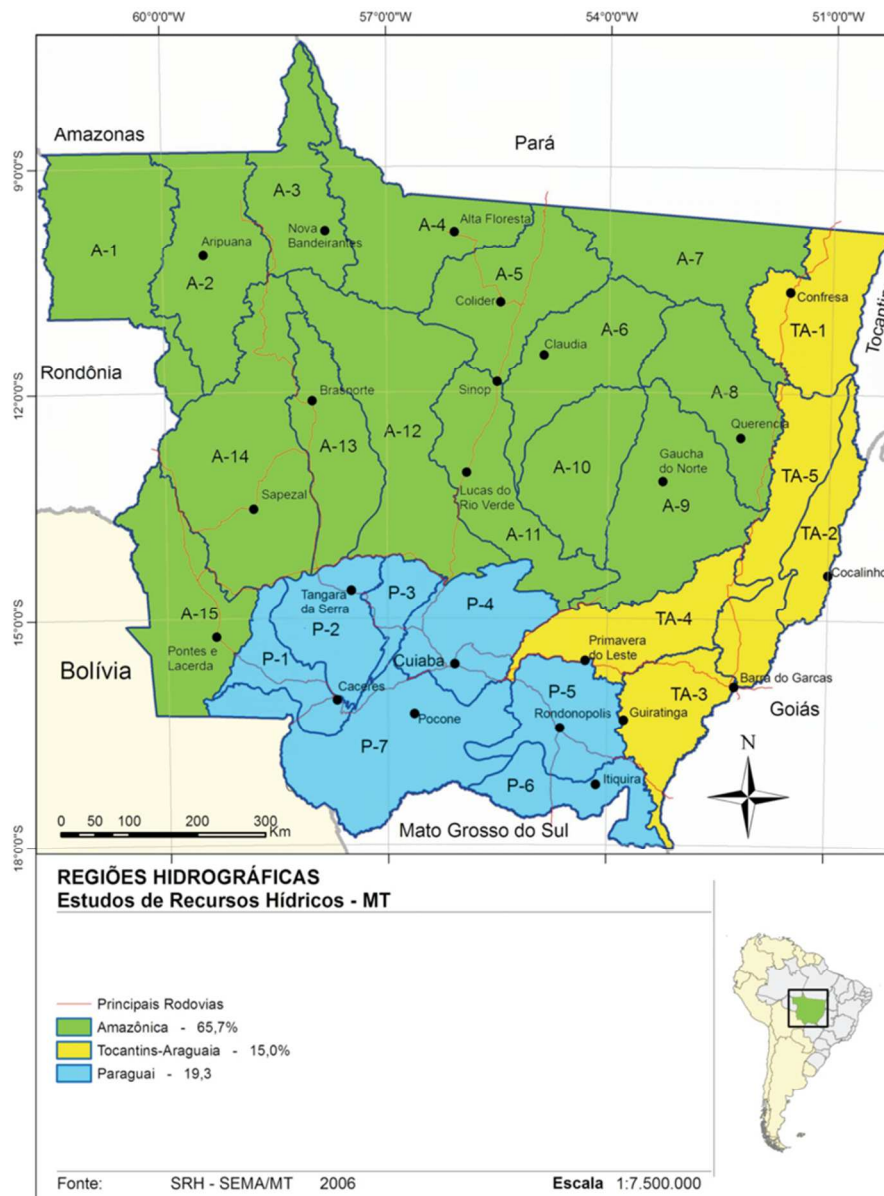
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Table 1 – The Three Schematic Phases of Place-making in the Teles Pires River Basin			
Place-making period	Main direction of place-making	Fundamental characteristics	Impacts and consequences
1970s - 1980s	Displacement	National security and development policies; influx of thousands of migrants to public and private colonisation schemes, as well as to isolated farms	Violent transformation of socio-ecological features (ecosystems, resources, landscapes, communities, etc.); private appropriation of the commons
1990s – 2000s	Replacement	Macro-economic instabilities and dwindling financial support from the national state; technological change and ‘soyfication’ of farm production; market obstacles and infrastructure limitations	Migration out of Mato Grosso and proletarianisation of most farmers (established in the previous phase); forced and turbulent adjustment to the new macro-economic situation and liberalising pressures; concentration of rural properties
+ 2000s	Misplacement	Flexibilisation of market transactions and more direct insertion of the regional economy into globalised markets; more strategic and supportive role of the state	More decisive influence of national and international corporations; further concentration of land and socio-economic opportunities; increasing inequalities and socio-ecological impacts